W H S WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS W H S

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ADVENTURES IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH

By Dr. F. Clever Bald
Asst. Director, Mich. Historical Collections, Univ. of Michigan

Before one can write history, one must gather the materials. It has been said, "If you copy from one book, it is plagiarism; if you copy from ten, it is research." It is not quite as simple as that, but even so, it is necessary to consult many sources in order to write even a short historical article. These sources will be either Primary, evidence of contemporary witnesses, or Secondary, written at a later date.

II. Secondary sources. Most books are Secondary material, but are the easiest for the amateur to consult. To begin with, use should be made of the subject cards in a library catalog. When the books are in hand, do not fail to use the index and bibliography. Take full notes. Don't believe everything you read. For example: The first History of Michigan, by James H. Lanman, 1839, states that the British destroyed public property at Mackinac and Detroit, in 1796, before delivering the forts to American officers. This was not true, as Lanman would have learned had he read the report of Capt. Henry De Butts, who was present, or the letters of General Anthony Wayne, who came a month later.

I. Primary Sources, both printed and manuscript.

a. Official documents, legislative journals, and reports of officers, are usually printed and catalogued, and usually dependable.

b. Newspapers. Check with Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1670-1820, Clarence S. Brigham, Compiler; and Union List of Newspapers, 1820-1836 (U. S. and Canada). Newspapers are useful, but some of the early issues contained little local news, and also one must watch out for political or other bias. This is usually easy, as the editors were outspoken. Examples: The General Advertiser, Philadelphia, on March 6, 1797, two days after Washington retired from the presidency, declared, "The man who is the source of all the misfortunes of our country, is this day reduced to a level with his fellow-citizens, and is no longer possessed of power to multiply evils upon the United States." And the Detroit Free Press, then a Democratic paper, on October 29, 1863, in an editorial referring to President

Lincoln and his cabinet, proclaimed, "We cannot put faith in [these] men who have so uniformly erred in judgement."

Studying newspapers is slow work, partly because one's attention is often distracted by matter not pertinent to the subject. This gem is from a New York newspaper of July 30, 1796, more than 150 years ago, the author writing of new inventions, "...in this enlightened age when science is receiving its last polish, they will not be suffered to expire in oblivion." Nearly everything had been invented in 1796! Who knows, perhaps our inordinate pride in the great scientific achievements of our own day will in later years cause our descendants to smile at our simplicity, as we smile at that of our ancestors.

c. Diaries and personal letters were sometimes the only source of contemporary information before newspapers were printed. Besides, people often expressed themselves more characteristically in private than in public correspondence. Sometimes diaries and letters have been published, or included in historical society publications. But most are in manuscript form, and those in the possession of individuals are almost inaccessible. The largest collections of such material in Michigan are in the Burton Historical Collections in Detroit, and in the Clements Library and the Michigan Historical Collections on the University campus. There are some also in the Legal Research and Transportation Libraries here. Most library guides to their own manuscript material are far from up to date; our own goes through 1941 only, and the card catalog must be used for later items.

You are encouraged to write to any of these libraries, nearest to you, for what you want, but please make your requests specific. Do not ask for "everything you have on Michigan history," because the Michigan Historical Collections has 550,000 unbound manuscripts, 6500 volumes of bound manuscripts, and 15,000 books and other printed matter, ALL on Michigan history!

Many people do not realize the importance of personal letters as sources of historical information. Even though some may contain few new facts, they are useful as sources of atmosphere, attitudes, and local color. An example is a letter written by a Civil War soldier from Michigan, both before and after the first Battle of Bull Run. He was left on guard when his company retired without him, apparently forgotten. "If this," he gripes, "is the way they are going to treat us, I've had enough of this war!" This was highly valued by a graduate University student making a study of morale in wartime.

When did John R. Williams, a distinguished resident of Michigan, for whom John R. Street in Detroit was named, learn to speak and write English? After his father's death he grew up among the French-speaking relatives of his mother, and some writers declare that he learned English only in 1802, while he was in a Canadian prison. As a matter of fact, he was writing good English two years earlier, as letters in the Michigan Historical Collections, written by him in 1800, amply prove.

Some important information can be found only in personal papers. For example, many of the court records for the years when Michigan was part of the Northwest Territory, have been lost, but the papers

of Solomon Sibley, a Detroit lawyer, contain a great deal of information about the courts during that period.

d. Account books of individuals or corporations are valuable source material, teaching us about food, clothing, occupations, names of residents, etc. You might be surprised to know that Detroiters in the 1790's had other foods than venison, bear's grease, and hominy. Account books reveal luxuries such as tea, coffee, cocoa, olives, raisins, almonds, anchovies, and a variety of alcoholic beverages: madeira, port, brandy, etc.

In a number of instances account books have helped correct errors. Examples: (1) Books have credited Father Gabriel Richard with the first printing press at Detroit in 1809. The Burton Collection has the only known copy of a pamphlet printed in 1796 by John McCall in Detroit, but account books contain entries naming John McCall as a printer. What happened to that press? Douglas McMurtrie, in Early Printing in America, expressed the belief that it was destroyed in the fire of 1805; but an account book shows that it was sold to a New York printer on July 14, 1800, and shipped to Niagara. (2) Another quandary solved by an account book is whether Governor W. H. Harrison was in Detroit while Michigan was part of Indiana Territory; an entry for May 14, 1803, shows that he purchased in a Detroit store orange peel, lemon peel, sweet oil, capers, and anchovies. Such account books should be in libraries where they can be used as sources of information for correcting errors in written history.

Many people who have important personal papers hold on to them, intending some day to put them in a library where they will be safe. Too often they are lost through carelessness or destroyed by fire. Papers should be deposited in fireproof buildings before it is too late. If your manuscript records contain Michigan material, please give them to the Michigan Historical Collections of the University. There they will be protected against damage and destruction, arranged and catalogued so as to be useful for historians, students, and authors. If you prefer to retain ownership, they can be deposited on loan, and important items that cannot be loaned can be photostated or microfilmed. Records of churches and other organizations are welcomed by the Collections. All printed and manuscript materials belonging to the Washtenaw Historical Society are deposited on indefinite loan with the Collections.

There is still plenty of unexplored territory in Michigan history and problems to solve. I have mentioned the earliest Michigan imprint in 1796, and the printer, John McCall. Who was he? Many people have looked for the answer. No one knows. Again,- the question came up of what flag to use in 1946, at the celebration of the Sesquicentennial of the American Occupation of Detroit. The answer sounds easy,- the Stars and Stripes. But Dr. Milo M. Quaife's book, The Flag of the United States, shows that a flag with alternate red and white stripes but no stars was frequently used. In response to a request from the Committee, I searched every possible source. I found only two letters by witnesses to the event: one said "the flag of the United States," the other "the stripes of America." So I recommended to the Committee the United States flag of that period, with 15 stars

and 15 stripes, authorized by the law of 1794, and that flag was used at the celebration. Nevertheless we still do not know certainly what flag was raised over Detroit on that memorable occasion, July 11, 1796. Yes, there is still much need for research.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
March 19, 1948

SANITARY PROBLEMS IN THE ANN ARBOR AREA

By Ezra Shoecraft
of Shoecraft, Drury & McNamee, Consulting Engineers

In Michigan, agencies responsible for sanitation enforcement are (1) the United States Public Health Service, (2) the State Health Department, (3) the health units of counties, and (4) the local health departments of cities. The United States Public Health Service really sets up the standards and the other units named endeavor to apply regulations based on those standards as fast as their educational campaigns will allow.

During the greater part of the period that our grandparents lived, they were constantly menaced by epidemics of (1) typhoid fever, caused by polluted drinking water, disease-bearing flies, and human carriers; and (2) malaria, carried by the mosquito. In those early days, life was more primitive than our present standard of living. Sanitary regulations were almost unknown. About the only regulation that prevailed prohibited throwing a dead cow or dead hog into a stream which some other farmer's stock used, farther down-stream, for drinking purposes. Our country in those times was more agricultural than industrial. There were a few large cities, but they did not really become great cities until they had solved their water supply and sewerage problems.

At the present time, all of Washtenaw County, except the area within the corporate limits of Ann Arbor, is under the jurisdiction of the Washtenaw County Health unit. The only exception is that the City of Ypsilanti does some work among its residents with local nurses. The Washtenaw County Health unit has many functions in order to maintain a reasonable health standard, such as: 1. milk inspection; 2. issuing permits for and approval of individual sanitary sewage disposal plants where no public sanitary sewer is available; 3. the inspection of taverns and restaurants; 4. the examination of food handlers; 5. the inspection of water supplies; 6. inspection work given on assignment by the State Health Department.

This organization is alert and acts promptly and cooperatively whenever there is a violation of public health rules. It is constantly urging action by public officials in places in the county where conditions are unsatisfactory. The personnel of this group is made up of individuals experienced in public health matters, and may well be classified as professional. They spend a great deal of time on preventive measures.

Recently the unit has been urging action to improve the water supply and sewage disposal for housing groups which have been built on the fringe of Ann Arbor. City water and city sanitary sewers are not available for such areas due to regulations by the City. Any proposal for solving this problem quickly becomes controversial. If the areas could be annexed to the City of Ann Arbor, a part of the problem would be solved The right to the use of utilities would be answered. The cost of installing sewers and water mains would undoubtedly have to be paid by the individual areas, regardless of the method of financing.

If the City of Ann Arbor should extend the privilege of these utilities to areas outside the city, it is probable that the best plan would be to organize districts for each area involved. The Township Board of the area in question would enter into contract with the City for such utility service and be responsible for paying for it.

It is the writer's personal opinion that city regulations should be modified to make city utilities available to these people. It should be remembered that water and sewerage facilities are operated as utilities. Their original construction cost, operation costs, and fixed charges are paid for by income from the users of those services. No tax money from the taxpayer is used, except to pay for water used by the City, and charged for at an established rate.

The main reason to be advanced for making water and sewerage service available to these outlying areas is public health. In the main, these small areas depend on shallow individual wells for water supply. Such wells are easily polluted by surface water. Such a condition is ideal for a typhoid epidemic to start.

The usual method for the final disposal of sanitary wastes is by an individual septic tank for each house. If the soil where the tank is built is pervious, such as sand and gravel, no great problem arises. But where the soil is impervious, such as clay, this method of treatment is not satisfactory. It happens that nearly all of the areas on Ann Arbor's fringes are clay. This means that these people are left with no satisfactory individual disposal scheme.

The so-called fringe development is not a minor matter, as, according to a survey made in November, 1946, by the Washtenaw County Health unit, there are near Ann Arbor 1,154 houses with a population of 3,462 and 33 business establishments; and near Ypsilanti, 955 houses with a population of 2,898. The number of people that inhabit these two fringe areas should impress the citizens of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti that they have a problem right at their front doors which must be given attention.

The estimated population of Washtenaw County at this time is approximately 131,550. The estimated population of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Willow Run that have water filtration plants, is 64,500. There are municipal well water supplies in the county that serve a population of 6,100. This would indicate that 54% of the people of the county are served either by a laboratory-controlled or a municipal water supply. Both types of supply are subject to the approval of the State Health Department. The student populations of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti are not taken into consideration in the above figures.

We are now experiencing a radical change in living distribution. For the past 4 or 5 years we have noted the decentralization of urban populations. This moving to the country has not always ended as happily as it might. The persons affected have not always examined the soil. Many times it is hard blue clay, and they can find no satisfactory method for sanitary waste disposal. Or they may settle where there is no satisfactory well water supply. There really is no excuse for such trouble. If the prospective home builder would confer

with the Washtenaw County Health unit, preferably before a building lot is purchased, he would find a sympathetic ear. He would receive advice as to where a water supply suitable for his domestic needs could be developed, and where a satisfactory method of sanitary waste disposal could be built.

Another by-product of decentralization is the changing of many of our rural and residential communities into industrial centers. Very few of such communities have facilities to care for the industrial wastes that are produced. If it should so happen that any of these wastes are poisonous, it becomes a very serious matter for the municipality itself. The municipality is the responsible party for it has accepted the flow from the factory into its public sewer system.

Two cases have come to our attention within the past six months, one in Lenawee County and one in Macomb County. In each instance a factory discharged an effluent that contained cyanide which killed 4 or 5 cows. No sewage treatment plant can handle such an effluent.

The people of Ann Arbor are very fortunate. It has an adequate raw water supply for a population of several times its present population. The raw water is filtered and softened before entering the distribution system. The filtration and softening plant may from time to time require additional capacity to meet the needs, but this can easily be accomplished by building additional units. The City also has a first-class activated sludge sewage treatment plant. During the past two years it has been overloaded at times, due to heavy increases in population and in industrial activity. The City has planned improvements at the sewage plant that will easily double its present capacity, and will also provide for garbage disposal.

Few cities are in better sanitary condition than Ann Arbor. Its problem now is to find some way to remove the health hazard that has been developed just beyond its corporation line.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
November 21, 1947

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